



WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

April 3, 2009

MTA Phone: 517-321-6467

MTA FAX: 517-321-8908

Please route to all interested parties in your township.

BUDGETS BEGIN TO MOVE AS REVENUES CONTINUE TO FALL

It is traditional for the Legislature to try and pass all budget bills for the coming year through one chamber prior to taking their spring break. The Legislature begins a two-week break starting today, but only a minority of the budgets have come up for a vote in either chamber. The problem is not a lack of effort; it is an economy that is shifting so quickly, that any attempt to create a budget is quickly destroyed by the falling revenue projections. A special meeting occurred this week with the governor, her budget director and the four legislative leaders to talk about the significant problems that are developing within the current year budget. Current estimates are starting to show as much as a \$1 billion shortfall in the state's current year budget. Leaders have agreed to spend the two-week recess planning changes to the budget to alleviate the shortfall. Much of the discussion will revolve around using the federal stimulus money to patch holes within the state budget. This also means a careful review of the budget bills for next year if the assumed state revenues can't be depended upon.

HOUSE ETHICS COMMITTEE CONSIDERS NO-REASON ABSENTEE BALLOT BILL

The House Ethics and Elections Committee heard testimony this week on legislation introduced to allow electors to request an absentee voter ballot even if they don't meet one of the six current requirements for obtaining an AV ballot. HB 4097, introduced by Rep. Marty Griffin (D-Jackson), would allow a voter to obtain an AV ballot without requiring a justification when applying for the ballot. The bill is a re-introduction from last year, which passed the House but was not considered by the Senate. MTA has long supported this concept to allow voters more flexibility and to free them from the burden of "lying" to conform to one of the six current requirements when requesting an AV ballot. Several committee members expressed concern over possible fraud and there was some discussion of early voting as an alternative. All agreed that no-reason AV voting would not increase overall voter turnout but would frontload the process and reduce those voting on Election Day. The committee will continue discussions on the bill after Easter break.

AMENDMENTS CONSIDERED FOR RECREATION AUTHORITIES

The Senate recently approved legislation that would allow school districts to be part of recreation authorities. SB 222, offered by Sen. John Gleason (D-Flushing), would amend the Recreation Authorities Act and allow school districts to be members of the authority for the first time. Under the current law, only cities, villages, townships and counties can organize and form a recreational authority. It was argued that school districts should be included based on the fact that it is the schools that have invested heavily in recreational infrastructure such as athletic fields, gyms and pools. In these days of shrinking budgets, collaboration between schools and municipalities to provide recreational services to the community would seem to be a natural fit.

FIREFIGHTER CANCER PRESUMPTION BILL APPROVED

Legislation was approved this week by the House that would allow firefighters who develop one of a number of types of cancers to have that cancer be considered a job related illnesses. This would allow the firefighter to collect worker's disability as a last resort in obtaining living expenses. HB 4473 was sponsored by Rep. Jennifer Haase (D-Richmond). The bill, which applies to full-time firefighters who have been employed for at least five years, will allow for worker's disability compensation for certain types of cancers known to be related to the profession. Firefighters would not be covered in cases of a pre-existing condition or if the firefighter has been a consistent cigarette smoker or user of tobacco within 10 years of diagnosis. The long-time controversial issue (bill) now moves to the Senate.

END